

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 32317

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAS: PINT, FR

SUBJECT: FRENCH DOMESTIC POLITICAL TROUBLES

POUCHED: BORDEAUX, LYON, MARSEILLE, MARTINIQUE, NICE, STRASBOURG

1. SUMMARY. THE CURRENT MALAISE IN FRENCH DOMESTIC POLITICS, EXEMPLIFIED BY DEMANDS FOR PRIME MINISTER MESSMER'S RESIGNATION BY ALL THREE LEADING PARIS WEEKLIES PUBLISHED DECEMBER 17, STEMS FROM THREE EPARATE SOURCES: THE INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL SITUATION; INFLATION AND THE ENERGY CRISIS; AND THE RECRUDESCENCE OF SCANDAL, OF WHICH THE MOST RECENT IS THE CAARD ENCHAFNE AFFAIR (PARIS' T-31754). OF THESE THREE ELEMENTS, ONLY THE LATTER IS NEW AND ONLY THE SCANDALS ARE A MATTER THE GOF CAN RECTIFY. TO THE AVERAE FRENCHMAN HIS GOVERNMENT APPEARS VACILLATING AND WEAK, AND APPARENTLY ACTS ILLEGALLY AS WELL. IT IS STILL TOO EARLY TO TALK OF SPECIFIC MINISTERIAL CHANGES, AND PRESIDENT POMPIDOU IS STUBBORN ENOUGH NOT TO WISH TO CHANGE HIS
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GOVERNMENT AT A TIME NOT OF HIS CHOOSING, BUT IS CERTAINLY CLEAR

THAT THE POPULARITY OF THE GOVERNMENT AND IN PARTICULAR OF POMPIDOU AND OF MESSMER, IS SLIPPING AND, THUS FAR, WITHOUT ANY GOF ACTIONS WHICH MIGHT COUNTER THIS. END SUMMARY

2. THE GOF IS HARDLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE INTERNATIONAL AND ECONOMIC ELEMENTS OF THE CURRENT POLITICAL DISCONTENT. NEVERTHELESS, FRENCH FOREIGN AND ECONOMIC POLICIES IN RECENT MONTHS DO NOT COME ACROSS AS HAVING BEEN EFFECTIVE. FRANCE FACES THE SAME SHORTAGE OF PETROLEUM AS MOST OF HER EUROPEAN PARTNERS--DESPITE HER SUPPORT FOR THE ARABS. WHILE FRENCH INFLATION IS NO WORSE THAN THAT IN SOME OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES, THE GOF HAS BEEN MUCH LESS EXPLICIT IN ADMITTING ITS SERIOUSNESS, AND THE STEPS IT HAS TAKEN TO COUNTER ITS ECONOMIC PROBLEMS ARE TIMID IN COMPARISON WITH THOSE OF OTHER COUNTRIES. IN ANY EVENT, IT IS POMPIDOU AND MESSMER AND THE GOF IN GENERAL WHICH ARE BLAMED BY THE AVERAGE FRENCHMAN FOR THE INFLATION AND AN INEPT FOREIGN POLICY. THE GAULLIST CONCEPTION OF A STRONG PRESIDENT, ONE VISIBLY RESPONSIBLE FOR FOREIGN--AND INCREASINGLY FOR DOMESTIC--AFFAIRS MEANS THAT CRITICISMS ARE INEVITABLY DIRECTED PERSONALLY AT POMPIDOU. MESSMER IS, AT MOST, THE AGENT OF THE PRESIDENT, THE EXECUTOR OF POLICIES FORMULATED BY THE PRESIDENT.

3. WHAT MAKES THE CURRENT SITUATION PARTICULARLY WORRISOME FOR THE GOF STEMS FROM THE RECRUESCENCE OF DOMESTIC POLITICAL SCANDAL. SINCE THE LAST REPORT ON THE CANARD ENCHAFNE AFFAIR (PARIS' T-31 54), THE INVOLVEMENT OF OFFICIAL POLICE SERVICES IN THE BUGGING OPERATION HAS BECOME POPULARLY ACCEPTED. INTERIOR MINISTER MARCELLIN, ADDRESSING THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DECEMBER 14, BLAMED THE AFFAIR ON A CONSPIRACY OF THE LEFT, WHICH HE SAID HAS LONG WISHED TO DISCREDIT HIM. MARCELLIN'S STATEMENT HAS DONE NOTHING TO QUIET CRITICISM OF HIS INVOLVEMENT IN THE AFFAIR; AND EVEN HE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE UDR (GAULLISTS), ALEXANDRE SANGUINETTI, STATED THAT IF THE OFFICIAL INVOLVEMENT IS DISCOVERED, "EXEMPLARY SANCTIONS MUST BE TAKEN." THE JUDICIAL INVESTIGATION OF THE CANARD AFFAIR IS CONTINUING. INTEREST REMAINS VERY HIGH AND THE WHOLE AFFAIR IS CONSIDERED BY SOME POLITICAL COMMENTATORS AS EXEMPLIFYING THE MODUS OPERANDI OF THE PRESENT GOF: INVASION OF PRIVACY, RESORT TO ARBITRARY PROCEDURES, AND ATTEMPTS TO COVER UP SCANDALS RATHER CONFIDENTIAL

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THAN TO EXTIRPATE THEM.

4. THE MALAISE IS NOW CRYSTALLIZING IN THE DEMAND FOR MINISTERIAL CHANGES--IN PARTICULAR THE OUSTING OF MESSMER. THE THREE MAIN FRENCH WEEKLIES ALL SUGGEST THAT MESSMER'S DAYS ARE (OR SHOULD BE) NUMBERED. IT IS WORTHWHILE TO NOTE THAT THESE CRITICISMS ARE OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE GOF AND NOT OF MESSMER PERSONALLY, ABOUT WHOSE PERSONAL HONESTY AND PROBITY THERE APPEARS TO BE NO

DOUBT. HE IS, HOWEVER, PRIME MINISTER OF THE GOVERNMENT UNDER WHICH ALL THE PROBLEMS MENTIONED ABOVE ARE COMING TO A HEAD.

5. PRESIDENT POMPIDOU'S PROBLEMS ARE EXACERBATED BY HIS APPARENTLY CONTINUING ILL HEALTH AND THIS, OF COURSE, INCREASES POLITICAL SPECULATION AND CONTRIBUTES TO THE SENSE OF MALAISE. A MINISTERIAL SHAKEUP NOW COULD BE CONSTRUED AS INDICATING THAT POMPIDOU INTENDED TO RESIGN BEFORE THE END OF HIS TERM IN 1976. THE NEW PRIME MINISTER WOULD PRESUMABLY BE CONSIDERED AS POMPIDOU'S DAUHIN. IT IS HARDLY IN THE PRESIDENT'S INTEREST TO BUILD UP THE POSITION OF A POSSIBLE RIVAL IF POMPIDOU IS ABLE TO FINISH HIS TERM AND THEN RUN AGAIN. OF THE LIKELIEST CANDIDATES FOR THE PRIME MINISTRY, GISCARD D'ESTAING HAS BECOME TAINTED WITH SOME OF THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR INFLATION AND IS ANATHEMA TO THE GAULISTS, POMPIDOU IS AT BEST LUKEWARM TOWARD CHABAN-DELMAS, CHIRAC IS PROBABLY NOT "READY" GUICHARD IS NO MORE INSPIRING THAN MESSMER, WHILE THE APPOINTMENT OF A POLITICAL OUTSIDER LIKE JOBERT WOULD BE SEEN AS - CONTINUATION OF THE GAULLIST SYSTEM OF RULING WITHOUT POLITICAL CONSULTATION. ARMED FORCES MINISTER GALLY REMAINS A POSSIBILITY NOR CAN IT BE LOST ON POMPIDOU THAT THE RESURGENT SOCIALIST PARTY, WHICH HAS JUST HELD A CONGRESS ON THE S
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